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ABSTRACT

Community colleges and public libraries have much in common, can both learn from each other, and have a great deal to share with each other as they carry out their respective roles: both profess to have total community-wide service as their goal/objective; both draw upon the same population and tax base; and the general public often makes use of the same kinds of materials that are found in both places. These commonalities obviously create problems of duplication and competition, and thus, logically, provide a reason for cooperation between them. Obstacles are presented, however, by the prejudices of each side: librarians favor specific types of libraries for specific types of institutions and/or citizens, and community colleges argue that regional accreditation agencies require a separate facility and access to resources and services on the scene. Although there are already some cases that contradict these assumptions, it is suggested that social institutions cooperate only when they are poor or when their self-interest is vitally involved. Even if they can get their acts together concerning missions and roles, cooperation will entail an examination of the prospective fiscal resources to do the job, either separately or together; community planning; and cooperative goals. No one should underestimate the difficulty of overcoming local and institutional jealousies. (JD)

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THE PUBLIC LIBRARY AND THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE
WHAT DOES COOPERATION MEAN?

by

Edward G. Holley

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THE PUBLIC LIBRARY AND THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

WHAT DOES COOPERATION MEAN?

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When my wife was leafing through the preliminary program for the ALA conference this year, she said, "Are you speaking at this conference on the community college and the public library?" I admitted, somewhat ruefully, that I was and she responded, "What do you know about that?" She had me there, and I wondered what momentary madness had made me accept Dr. Vann's invitation to be your keynote speaker. But thinking about the paucity of literature on the community college library field, I knew that if I didn't know much about the topic, nobody else did either, and I might shed just a bit of light as a result of other experiences. After all, I have worked in the area of library cooperation long enough to offer some observations on the topic and perhaps expand further on what I call the Holley Hypothesis: that social institutions cooperate only when they are poor, or their self interest is vitally involved. That may be too bold a statement, and I confess my indebtedness to Robert B. Downs in framing it. Nonetheless, I believe that it's true (granting that poverty is relative) and will come back to the principle before the conclusion of the speech.

This "conference-within-a-conference" has as its theme the community college and public libraries with an implied assumption that they have much in common, that they can both learn from each other, and that they have a great deal to share with each other as they carry out their respective roles. Yet my first question about the meaning of cooperation for public libraries and community colleges relates to

their statement of mission. In the past few years I have read and heard much about the mission of the public library and the mission of the community college. As one who has only a modest amount of experience with either type, I can only say that the rhetoric of the community college and the public library seem to me much the same. The community college, in the enthusiasm which comes from their recent position as the favored child in higher education, has adopted for itself a statement of goals and objectives which encompasses a mission as a total community-wide service, a center around which all activities in a locality may take place, leadership in adult and further education activities, attention to the out-of-school learner, cultural enrichment for its community, and college preparatory work for the first two years as well as vocational training for those who will end their formal schooling with this collegiate experience. If you think that's a tall order, encompassing as it does a position which the medieval church once held, you are right. Also, if you listened carefully to my recitation, you know that many of those goals and objectives are the same ones which the public library also espouses and has traditionally assumed to be its own reason for existence. Maybe a little shy on the information function, but still an appeal to the young adult, the college-age student, the housewife, the local white and blue collar worker, and the senior citizen. Only the small child is left out of this litany of worthy social aims and I suspect that even he or she is not totally neglected in the workshops and institute programs planned for the enrichment of the community.

Thus, it seems to me, one of the first problems faced by the community college and the public library is competition for the same kind of services to the same group of citizens. In that battle, the community college is probably winning at present because of the enormous amount of tax dollars being spent in most states to put a community college or technical institute within driving distance of every

citizen. New buildings, up-to-date equipment, a variety of non-print media, and a corps of highly qualified librarians and/or media specialists plus the interest of the community leaders enhance the opportunity for fulfilling the goals ennunciated in the rhetoric mentioned above. Certainly in terms of the public library in many small communities, primarily with printed materials, with modest staff, and often with unattractive buildings, the competition may well result in no contest. Even in printed materials, the community college, because it is new, usually has a better selection of general adult materials than does the public library.

Now I do not intend to suggest that these two types of institutions are deliberately and aggressively locked in a death struggle. In most cases I suspect they are even unaware of the fact that their basic approach to the public is couched in much the same type of language. This is one of the facets of the problem that bothers me. We've heard much about the public library and the public schools as duplicative social agencies, but no one has yet called attention to the fact that these two other social agencies will also be vying for attention from the tax-paying public.

Why is this so important? In many cases the public library and the community college draw on the same population and same tax base. Some states have community college districts with a special property tax to support the college. Others fund the institution from state tax revenues, either wholly or in part. And in some states the local taxpayer is responsible for the capital expenditures even when the state does fund the college's basic operations. Since tuition is either non-existent or modest (because the college is supposed to provide both an open door admissions policy and be the one higher education agency freely available to all without economic constraints), this means that the college's operational funds come either from the local property tax or some form of state aid, both of which are also prime sources

for the local public library's support.

Furthermore, if we are realistic, we must admit that the general public often makes use of the same kind of materials that are found in both places. The Choice basic list of reference books in its opening day collection probably ought to be present not only in the community college reference collection, but also in the public library if we are serious about the public library as an information source. Few libraries serving an adult population can do without the standard magazines, though it is true that the public library is likely to be a bit stronger on the literary or fiction side and the community college on the technical and vocational side. But can one imagine a library which does not have The Atlantic Monthly, Harper's, National Geographic, etc.? Not that you may not need to have more than one copy, but any good library serving adults is likely to have these titles and many others, whether it is designated "public," or "community college, " or "technical institute," or "school."

Let us take a not so hypothetical example.[1] A small county with 62,000 residents, including the very affluent and the very poor, a public library with a collection of 66,000 volumes spending $168,200 per year on materials and staff in two locations, a two-year branch of a major state institution with 24,472 volumes, spending $67,300, for an estimated 700 students (probably high); and a technical institute with 9,300 volumes and a strong non-print media collection spending $62,200 for an estimated 900 students (again, probably high). One can say that this is too small an enrollment base for two such colleges and he would be right, but that's not the question. These three social institutions, all within one mile of each other, serve essentially the same population, but do not really have decent basic budgets to serve any of them well. If one combined the budgets of all three he would have approximately $300,000, about enough to operate one good library. Would it be possible to establish one library facility with modest branches for these three agencies for the benefit of all the citizens, including the students? The theoretical answer

to that question is undoubtedly "yes." Indeed, if one wanted to be positive about the situation, the question should be posed, "Why should these library resources and services be separate?" Whatever the population growth and however strong a case can be made for additional local and/or state funds, the likelihood of having enough funds to staff any of the operations with the requisite number of highly qualified librarians/media specialists seems remote. The public library now employs thirteen staff in two locations, the technical institute four, and the two-year university branch two.

Here are some of the arguments used against establishing a joint library:

1. It would violate the concept of the public library as a broad spectrum of services under one roof.
2. The public library has largely a fiction collection while the colleges have largely a non-fiction collection.
3. The colleges do not serve children.

These arguments, of course, reflect our general library prejudices in favor of specific types of libraries for specific types of institutions and/or citizens. What librarians seem unwilling to recognize is that the general public does not see library service in that context. To many of them "a library is a library is a library." No wonder the concept of placing the public library's children's collection in the public schools arises so often. Moreover, many studies of public library users have demonstrated that either a majority or a significant minority are students, either from the K through 12 set, or colleges.[2] Why, under these circumstances, the public library has been so reluctant to acknowledge this fact and work out arrangements which would serve one of their most significant number of users I do not know, but the future may be very different. The one major attempt to satisfy this need was the New York Public Library's establishment of a quarter of a million volume duplicate collection in its

Midtown Manhattan Branch about ten years ago so that the thousands of New York City college students would cease destroying the research collections of the Research Libraries through constant use. This innovative venture has been highly successful, no thanks, incidentally, to the colleges and universities, and thanks chiefly to the selfishness of the NYPL which understandably wanted to protect its major collections for the use of the real scholar.

Especially in small communities, with modest populations and the same tax payers, the same situation may well apply as a recent study of public libraries in schools indicated: they can be successful in the same locality and they can make use of the same human resources.[3] If I stress the human resources, it is not only because I am a library school dean and hence sensitive to the employment of graduates, but also because I think this is an area of cooperation which is so often overlooked. The sharing of a physical facility is often a recognizable cost benefit and the avoidance of duplicate sets of expensive reference works is also obvious. But far more significant in the long run, in terms of the annual budget, is the ability to fund well-educated and professionally competent librarians whose salaries, like those of most public employees, must necessarily rise every year to take care of inflation. Moreover, it is idle to pretend that all the specialized expertise a community needs can be secured through the employment of one, or two, or even three or four persons. In the future, as computerized operations and bibliographic data bases become a more important part of library services, both the public library and the community college will find it advantageous to make arrangements to share such personnel. That, of course, is the most glamorous example. What's wrong with considering the sharing of other personnel for more traditional services such as materials selection, processing, readers' services, etc.?

The argument is often made on the part of the community college (or any other

college) that the regional accreditation agencies require a separate facility and access to resources and services on the scene. The example of the Shelby County Community College and the Memphis Public Library about which we'll hear following this speech, should contradict that. And as one who chaired the committee on the revision of the Southern Association Standard 6, "The Library," I can assure this audience that Illustration 5, "Institutional Relationships," was not put in by accident. Let me read that statement on cooperation:

5. Institutional Relationships

> In order to enhance the ability of the library to provide all the resources and services needed by its users, cooperative relationships with other libraries and agencies should be explored. Cooperative arrangements involving federal or state agencies, the libraries of other institutions, business and industry, and community agencies, are examples of relationships which are useful in supplementing an institution's own library resources and services. In all cases where cooperative arrangements are a necessity, the institution must establish formal agreements providing safeguards to preserve the integrity and continuity of library resources and services. Cooperative relationships should not be used by institutions to avoid their responsibility to provide appropriate and accessible library resources and services.[4]

What the regional accreditation agencies want to be assured is that substantial library resources and services to meet the educational goals of the institution are available and at the same time that no institution escapes its basic fiscal responsibility for providing such resources and services. I cannot imagine any accreditation team turning down an institution with access to a well-stocked, well-staffed joint facility which serves the educational objectives of a college and arguing for a pitifully inadequate, vacated barn, filled with a modest little collection of books, presided over by one or two harrassed librarians. There is a good deal of nonsense going on here and we might as well expose it for what it is . Not that I want to be harsh about the librarian who may be doing the best he or she can and who may very well be the pawn in a game played by an incompetent college administrator who wants to protect his

or her own turf. I warned you at the beginning that institutional jealousies play a leading role in defeating cooperative ventures. One can certainly understand that no institution wants to commit suicide. Why else do you suppose that small post offices and small libraries continue to exist? As the Battelle study of Oklahoma libraries recently attested, even the smallest and most inadequate libraries are appreciated by the local citizens who, despite annual book expenditures of less than $500, want to maintain their library's independence.[5]

Or not to pick on the Oklahomans, why do you think that the Research Libraries Group will continue without the presence of Harvard as its sails upon the uncharted seas of BALLOTS? Predictably, noble ideals and hopes ultimately give way to reality once foundation grants or other outside funding run out. Clearly, in line with the Holley hypothesis, Harvard is not yet poor enough nor has it enough self-interest involved to follow this particular cooperative path. Not surprising, for after all, Harvard <u>is</u> Harvard.[6]

But back more directly to our question: what does cooperation mean for the public libraries and the community colleges, provided they can get their act together on missions and roles?

Let me make a few suggestions and then bring my part of this program to a close.

First of all, the librarians and their boards or administrations should ask themselves, "What are the prospective resources?" All the good will in the world will not carry a project successfully if there are not fiscal and human resources to do the job. It may be that the community is too small to support libraries. The tax base may give no promise of future support in sufficient quantity to provide adequate resources. Andrew Carnegie was not only a significant philanthropist, but also a canny business man. That's why he said anyone who got his money for a library

building would have to promise at least ten percent in perpetuity for operation.[7] Small may be beautiful, but there is something to the concept of economy of scale and this will increasingly be a factor to be reckoned with, especially for services that depend upon a local property tax base. A question which every citizen has a right to ask is "Must we spend our tax dollars this way?" Librarians must be prepared to give enough supporting demographic, fiscal, and philosophical data to convince a skeptical voting public.

As Richard L. Waters said in a recent article, "Tilting at the Windmill," "we have school libraries, public libraries, and college libraries. Those of us that are publicly financed by taxes must begin to move toward unitary library service. There is no valid reason why public, school, and community college libraries cannot exist under the same roof...The public is interested in library service, and I do not believe they really care which library provides the service. I am convinced that it is we librarians who have been the roadblock to breaking down barriers."[8] Whether or not you agree with Mr. Waters' assessment of cause and effect, the passage of Proposition 13 should be evidence enough that there will soon be a mad scramble among various social agencies for the same shrinking tax dollars. Some officials predict that the passage of Proposition 13 will almost certainly mean the end of "tuition-free" community college education in California since community colleges receive about half their financing from local property taxes.[9] You can be absolutely sure that public libraries, funded chiefly by local property taxes, will be competitors in any battle for funds. Mr. Waters may be more pessimistic than necessary when he opines "...let us not kid ourselves when it comes to the basic necessities of life, libraries and library services are not, never have been, and never will be perceived by the general public as a necessity...Therefore, unlimited financial resources are not available."[10] So, I suggest to you, in the strongest possible terms, cooperating means taking a very hard look at prospective fiscal resources to do the job, either separately or together.

Secondly, while there needs to be more cooperation in the sharing of resources, there should not be a sharing of general poverty. Joint or cooperative ventures that are going to be poorly supported or inadequately supported are not likely to achieve greater results than poorly supported ventures. Cooperation is not an answer for those who merely wish to abandon libraries or escape their responsibility for supporting them. A recent tentative study by the School of Library Science at Florida State University pointed out that a successful joint school-public library operation would likely cost more money overall.[11] Of course the point is that with an increased budget you ought to get far more than you would with two separately inadequately funded libraries, provided you have an integrated library. Certainly the use of computers in libraries is an example of this. Few individuals would be rash enough to justify use of computers as a device to save money. The best that one can hope for is stablization of costs, but the real benefit is that one gets a better system which can provide more services to users. I've often been amused at colleges whose administration cut library expenditures first in a vain attempt to save money (after all, one doesn't really need to buy new books, no one has read all that are in the library anyway). In most colleges one could eliminate the library budget entirely and still save not more than $50-150,000 out of a three or four million dollar budget. And the cost to the education of the student would be incalculable. All I'm saying here is "Don't engage in cooperation unless you are very sure that the prospective funding for the operation is sound and adequate to do the job." And I note for the record that most successful cooperative programs have built on strength, not poverty.

Thirdly, I would stress the importance of total community planning, a recommendation of the Florida State Study, incidentally.[12] How can the libraries, not only of public libraries and community colleges, but also of other public and private agencies best serve the total community needs? Planning for cooperation is not a method of avoiding

hard decisions. After careful planning one may decide that some parts of the community will not be served well. But this decision should be a conscious decision and one ought to be able to serve more people with better materials at less expense cooperatively than separately. Otherwise you might just as well continue your separatist ways. If testing services are available at the local community college, as they are at Forsyth Tech, then there is no reason for the Forsyth Public Library to bring in a testing or counseling specialist. If a reading specialist is available either in the local college or the school system, then there is no reason to employ one at the public library. If bibliographic expertise for literature searching is available at the public library, then there should be no need to duplicate this expensive service at the college or school. Often the public library need look no further than the local college or school for talented individuals who can offer a lecture series, or musical performance, or art show, or information itself.

In the past decade a number of educational consortia in higher education have emerged. They are usually located in major cities around the country. When asked to cite what cooperative ventures these consortia have launched successfully, the response invariably is interlibrary loans or library cooperative acquisitions. Truth to tell, these activities were already going on before the consortium was organized, and it may be an indication of the difficulty of cooperative endeavors in higher education, or the poverty of the thinking among their directors, that library activities are the only projects most educational consortia can cite as evidence of their success. My point here is that there are many library cooperatives already in existence which involve neither public libraries nor community colleges. They sometimes have resulted from the initiative of local academic library leadership or from state library leadership with modest funding from LSCA Title III or state systems funds. I heard someone say at Midwinter that the public library should be viewed as a partner or coordinator of all public and private

library and information resources in a community. My own observation is that the public library has rarely been the linking pin in such activities and seems to me unlikely to do so in the future. If it does, it will have to fight for that role with other types of libraries which have quite a different view of the shape of the world. If community colleges regard themselves as par excellence the community center, replacing church and school, they, too, may challenge the public library for this leadership role.

Finally, I would point out the necessity for articulating clearly what one expects to accomplish by proposed cooperative endeavors. Legal documents do not always have to spell out specifically all that one has in mind, but they should not be so vaguely worded that the average citizen cannot understand the ultimate objectives. It will be difficult enough to assure the political support of the county or city council, the state library, the state board of higher education, the public library board, or city manager. Plans that are nebulous and cannot stand the most serious scrutiny by county managers or other administrative officials are not likely to succeed. Such administrators have many other pressures with which to contend and aren't likely to spend their available time on ill-conceived plans.

Nor should one underestimate the difficulty of overcoming local and institutional jealousies. After forty years, the Joint University Library system in Nashville, often touted as one of the prime examples of library cooperation in the country, is about to achieve its original laudable objectives: increasing the resources and services to three very different types of educational institutions. JUL illustrates better than any other institution the problems inherent in cooperative enterprises. Someday someone should write up JUL as a case history. In a period when it was supposed to be notably successful, the three colleges and universities continued to duplicate resources and one of them even built a new library building! Now, with two of the institutions

struggling with serious financial problems, the way seems clear for central bibliographic processing, for serious demarcation of fields of interest, for acquisitions, and for targeting staff resources in a realistic manner. That's not an inconsiderable achievement, but it took forty years! Whether or not we'll be able to afford forty years of struggle for success in today's fast-moving world is another question.

So at the end I'm afraid that I leave you with more questions than answers. Perhaps that's what a keynoter ought to do. At the very minimum I hope I have provided enough in the way of controversial statements that my distinguished colleagues on subsequent panels can suggest alternatives. For I do firmly believe in the importance, and, in some cases, the absolute necessity of cooperation if our task of serving all citizens is to be accomplished. As you grapple with these problems, I wish you all the luck in the world. You'll need it.

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June, 1978

NOTES

[1]Report of the Beaufort County Advisory Committee on Library Service to the Advisory Committee of the Low country Library Federation, Beaufort, S.C.; May 22, 1978.

[2]For example, see Chapter VI, "South Carolina'a Public Libraries: Their Relationship to Postsecondary Education," in Edward G. Holley et al. Resources of South Carolina Libraries (Columbia, S.C.: South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, 1976), pp. 109-127.

[3]Wilma Lee Woolard, "The Combined School and Public Library: Can It Work?", Library Journal, 103: 435-438 (February 15, 1978).

[4]The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Standards of the College Delegate Assembly, Atlanta, December 15, 1976, p. 21.

[5]Beverly A. Rawles et al. A Needs Assessment Study of Oklahoma Libraries, Draft of Final Report to Oklahoma Department of Libraries (Columbus, Ohio: Battelle, April, 1978), pp. 19-20, 34, 36-37, 56, 81-82, 86-87, 94, esp. 98-100.

[6]"Harvard and RLG," College and Research Libraries News (June, 1978), p. 184.

[7]George S. Bobinski, "Andrew Carnegie," in Dictionary of American Library Biography (Littleton, Colorado: Libraries Unlimited, 1978), pp. 70-71.

[8]Richard L. Waters, "Tilting at the Windmill," Library Journal, 103: 1233 (June 15, 1978).

[9]Beverly T. Watkins, "Campuses Gird for Consequences of Taxpayer Revolt," Chronicle of Higher Education, 16:11 (June 19, 1978).

[10]Waters, p. 1233.

[11]Shirley L. Aaron et al. A Study of the Combined School Public Library - Phase I. (Tallahassee, Florida: School of Library Science, Florida State University, 1977), pp. 63-64.

[12]Ibid.